

[FR Doc. 97-15829 Filed 6-16-97; 8:45 am]  
BILLING CODE 4120-01-C

## DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

### Fish and Wildlife Service

#### 50 CFR Part 17

#### RIN 1018-AB73

### Endangered and Threatened Wildlife and Plants, Notice of Second Reopening of Comment Period on Proposed Endangered Status for the Peninsular Ranges Population of the Desert Bighorn Sheep

**AGENCY:** Fish and Wildlife Service, Interior.

**ACTION:** Proposed rule, notice of second reopening of comment period.

**SUMMARY:** The Fish and Wildlife Service (Service), pursuant to the Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended (Act), provides notice of a second reopening of the comment period on the proposed endangered status for the Peninsular Ranges population of desert bighorn sheep (*Ovis canadensis*). On April 7, 1997, the Service reopened the comment period to acquire additional information from interested parties, and to resume the proposed listing action (62 FR 16518). In addition, the Service sought public comment on various articles and reports concerning the distinctiveness and status of bighorn sheep in the Peninsular Ranges. Because of a request to allow for further development of biological, distributional, and status information on the bighorn sheep, the comment period is reopened again for another 15 days.

**DATES:** The public comment period closes July 2, 1997. Any comments received by the closing date will be considered in the final decision on this proposal.

**ADDRESSES:** Written comments, materials and data, and available reports and articles concerning this proposal should be sent directly to the Field Supervisor, Carlsbad Field Office, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 2730 Loker Avenue West, Carlsbad, California 92008. Comments and materials received will be available for public inspection, by appointment, during normal business hours at the above address.

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:** Peter Sorensen, at the address listed above (telephone 760/431-9440, facsimile 760/431-9618).

## SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

### Background

The Peninsular Ranges population of the desert bighorn sheep occurs along desert slopes of the Peninsular Ranges from the vicinity of Palm Springs, California, into northern Baja California, Mexico. Depressed recruitment, habitat loss and degradation, disease, loss of dispersal corridors, and random events (e.g., drought) affecting small populations threaten the desert bighorn sheep in the Peninsular Ranges.

On May 8, 1992, the Service published a rule proposing endangered status for the Peninsular Ranges population of the desert bighorn sheep (57 FR 19837). The original comment period closed on November 4, 1992. The Service was unable to make a final listing determination regarding the bighorn sheep because of a limited budget, other endangered species assignments driven by court orders, and higher listing priorities. In addition, a moratorium on listing actions (Public Law 104-6), which took effect on April 10, 1995, stipulated that no funds could be used to make final listing or critical habitat determinations. Now that funding has been restored, the Service is proceeding with a final determination for the Peninsular Ranges population of the desert bighorn sheep.

Due to the length of time that has elapsed since the close of the initial comment period, changing procedural and biological circumstances and the need to review the best scientific information available during the decision-making process, the Service reopened the comment period for 30 days on April 7, 1997 (62 FR 16518). Moreover, the Service reopened the comment period to ensure that this proposed listing of a population of desert bighorn sheep is consistent with Service policy published on February 7, 1996, regarding the recognition of distinct vertebrate population segments (61 FR 4722). This policy requires that distinct population segments be discrete from other populations of the species, be biologically and/or ecologically significant to the species, and meet the standards of an endangered or threatened species under section 4(a) of the Act. On May 6, 1997, the Service received a request from Mr. Francis D. Logan, Jr., a representative of a landowner potentially affected by this proposal, to hold a public hearing and to extend the comment period to allow for the development of further biological, distributional, and status information on the bighorn sheep. Though the Service will not hold a hearing, the Service reopens the

comment period for 15 days. In this regard, the following recent articles and reports contained in Service files, including other non-cited information, remain available for public review:

- Berger, J.* 1990. Persistence of different-sized populations: An empirical assessment of rapid extinctions. *Conservation Biology* 4:91-98.
- Bleich, V., C., J. D. Wehausen, and S. A. Holl.* 1990. Desert-dwelling mountain sheep: Conservation implications of a naturally fragmented distribution. *Conservation Biology* 4:383-390.
- Bleich, V., C., J. D. Wehausen, R. R. Ramey II, and J. L. Rechel.* 1997. Metapopulation theory and mountain sheep: Implications for conservation. Pages 353-373 in D. R. McCullough, editor. *Metapopulations and Wildlife Conservation*, Island Press, Washington, D.C.
- Bighorn Institute.* 1996. Summary of the San Jacinto Mountains helicopter survey of Peninsular bighorn sheep. unpublished report, 2 pp.
- Bighorn Institute.* 1996. Summary of the Santa Rosa Mountains helicopter survey of Peninsular bighorn sheep. unpublished report, 3 pp.
- Boyce, W. M., P. W. Hedrick, N. E. Muggli-Cockett, S. Kalinowski, M. C. T. Penedo, and R. R. Ramey II.* 1997. Genetic variation of major histocompatibility complex and microsatellite loci: A comparison in bighorn sheep. *Genetics* 145:421-433.
- DeForge, J. R., E. M. Barrett, S. D. Ostermann, M. C. Jorgensen, and S. G. Torres.* 1995. Population dynamics of Peninsular bighorn sheep in the Santa Rosa Mountains, California. *Desert Bighorn Council Trans.* 39:50-57.
- R. R. Ramey II.* 1995. Mitochondrial DNA variation, population structure, and evolution of mountain sheep in the south-western United States and Mexico. *Molecular Ecology* 4:429-439.
- Rubin, E., and W. Boyce.* 1996. Results of helicopter survey conducted in Anza-Borrego Desert State Park. unpublished memo to Steve Torres (CDFG Bighorn Sheep Coordinator) and project collaborators. 6 pp.
- Wehausen, J. D., and R. R. Ramey II.* 1993. A morphometric reevaluation of the Peninsular bighorn subspecies. *Desert Bighorn Council Trans.* 37:1-10.

Regarding the above articles and reports, the Service particularly seeks information concerning:

- (1) the biological and ecological distinctiveness of bighorn sheep in the Peninsular Ranges from other populations of bighorn sheep;
- (2) other biological, commercial, or other relevant data on any threat (or lack thereof) to bighorn sheep in the Peninsular Ranges; and
- (3) the current size, number, or distribution of bighorn sheep populations in the Peninsular Ranges.

Written comments may now be submitted until July 17, 1997 to the Service office in the **ADDRESSES** section.

#### Authority

The authority for this action is the Endangered Species Act of 1973 (16 U.S.C. 1531 *et seq.*).

Dated: June 9, 1997.

**Thomas J. Dwyer,**

*Acting Regional Director, Region 1.*

[FR Doc. 97-15807 Filed 6-16-97; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 4310-55-P

## DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

### National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

#### 50 CFR Part 600

[I.D. 120996A]

#### Magnuson Act Provisions; Essential Fish Habitat (EFH); Public Meetings

**AGENCY:** National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Commerce.

**ACTION:** Public meeting.

**SUMMARY:** The National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) will hold a public meeting in San Francisco, CA, to provide an additional opportunity on the west coast for public input on the proposed rule to implement the essential fish habitat (EFH) provisions of the Magnuson Act.

**DATES:** The meeting is scheduled to be held on July 2, 1997, from 1 p.m. to 5 p.m.

**ADDRESSES:** The meeting will be held at the Holiday Inn North, 275 South Airport Boulevard, South San Francisco, CA. Requests for special accommodations should be addressed to Office of Habitat Conservation, Attention: EFH, NMFS, 1315 East-West Highway, Silver Spring, MD 20910-3282; telephone: 301/713-2325.

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:** Lee Crockett, NMFS, 301/713-2325.

#### SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

#### Background

NMFS issued proposed regulations containing guidelines for the description and identification of EFH in fishery management plans, adverse impacts on EFH, and actions to conserve and enhance EFH on April 23, 1997 (62 FR 19723). Notices to extend the comment period were published in the **Federal Register** on May 19, 1997, (62 FR 27214) and again on June 12, 1997 (62 FR 32071). The regulations would

also provide a process for NMFS to coordinate and consult with Federal and state agencies on activities that may adversely affect EFH. The guidelines are required by the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (Magnuson-Stevens Act). The purpose of the rule is to assist fishery management councils in fulfilling the requirements set forth by the Magnuson-Stevens Act to amend their FMPs to describe and identify EFH, minimize adverse effects on EFH, and identify other actions to conserve and enhance EFH. The purpose of the coordination and consultation provisions is to specify procedures for adequate consultation with NMFS on activities that may adversely affect EFH.

#### Special Accommodations

Requests for sign language interpretation or other auxiliary aids should be directed to Lee Crockett (see **ADDRESSES**) at least 5 days prior to the meeting date.

**Authority:** 16 U.S.C. 1801 *et seq.*

Dated: June 12, 1997.

**James P. Burgess,**

*Director, Office of Habitat Conservation, National Marine Fisheries Service.*

[FR Doc. 97-15873 Filed 6-16-97; 8:45 am]

BILLING CODE 3510-22-F

## DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

### National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

#### 50 CFR Part 679

[Docket No. 970520118-7118-01; I.D. 050197A]

RIN 0648-AJ00

#### Fisheries of the Exclusive Economic Zone Off Alaska; Individual Fishing Quota Program; Standard Allowances for Ice and Slime

**AGENCY:** National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Commerce.

**ACTION:** Proposed rule; request for comments.

**SUMMARY:** NMFS issues a proposed rule that would establish standard allowances for ice and slime found on unwashed Pacific halibut and sablefish landed in the Individual Fishing Quota (IFQ) fisheries for these species and incorporate them into the conversion factors for halibut and product recovery rates for sablefish used by NMFS to debit IFQ accounts. This action is necessary to correct inaccuracies in the

accounting process for landed IFQ product that are currently occurring because up to 15 percent of the industry participants have been adjusting the "initial accurate weight of . . . product obtained at the time of landing" by up to 9 percent to account for ice and slime. Such adjustments are not allowed under the existing regulations. The proposed rule would maintain the requirement that all processors must report the actual scale weight at the time of landing with no adjustments, but would revise the conversion factors and recovery rates used by NMFS for debiting IFQ accounts to include a standard allowance for ice and slime found on landed IFQ product.

**DATES:** Comments must be received by July 17, 1997.

**ADDRESSES:** Comments must be sent to Ronald J. Berg, Chief, Fisheries Management Division, Alaska Region, NMFS, 709 West 9th Street, Room 453, Juneau, AK 99801, or P.O. Box 21668, Juneau, AK 99802, Attn: Lori J. Gravel. Copies of the Environmental Assessment/Regulatory Impact Review for this action may be obtained from the above address.

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:** John Lepore, 907-586-7228.

#### SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

#### Background

The U.S. groundfish fisheries of the Gulf of Alaska and the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands in the exclusive economic zone are managed by NMFS pursuant to the fishery management plans (FMPs) for groundfish in the respective management areas. The FMPs were prepared by the North Pacific Fishery Management Council (Council) pursuant to the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (Magnuson-Stevens Act), 16 U.S.C. 1801 *et seq.*, and are implemented by regulations for the U.S. fisheries at 50 CFR part 679. The Northern Pacific Halibut Act of 1982 (Halibut Act), 16 U.S.C. 773 *et seq.*, authorizes the Council to develop, and NMFS to implement, regulations applicable in Convention waters to allocate halibut fishing privileges among U.S. fishermen.

Under these authorities, the Council developed the IFQ program, a limited access management system for the fixed gear Pacific halibut and sablefish fisheries. NMFS approved the IFQ program in November 1993 and fully implemented the program beginning in March 1995. The Magnuson-Stevens Act and the Halibut Act authorize the Council and NMFS to make regulatory changes to the IFQ program that are consistent with the FMPs and that are